

"Thank you for the invitation to join you, and thank you all for coming today to show your gratitude to the men and women who have worn America's uniform.

As American soldiers continue their assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must honor their bravery and the bravery that all soldiers display when they go to war. Throughout our history, our service members have always willingly left behind their safety, jobs, friends, and family members to answer the call of duty.

We must give back to these deserving soldiers. If you fight for your country overseas, you should not have to fight for the care and assistance you need when you return home. It should be provided.

The 110<sup>th</sup>

Congress made significant strides in this regard. While more needs to be done, some solid groundwork was laid.

To begin with, the Veterans Affairs funding bill for 2009 provided a 3 billion dollar increase over the president's request for Veteran's healthcare. Since the Democrats took control of Congress in 2007 we have increased VA funding by 19%, the largest increase in history and 6.7 billion dollars more than the President's requests. The recent bad press about the state of care at VA and military hospitals, particularly Walter Reed, made it clear that something of this magnitude needed to be done and could not wait.

Among other things, the extra money will go toward increasing services and enrollment for eligible veterans, strengthening care for those with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and traumatic brain injuries, and renovating VA hospitals where needed.

We also have a responsibility to make sure that when soldiers return home they are able to enter the workforce successfully.

To this end, this past June, Congress enacted the “GI Bill for the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century,” which will help veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars contribute to America’s economic recovery. This legislation ensures that these veterans will receive a four-year college education and is comparable to the original GI bill that allowed so many American families to prosper.

That original GI bill returned \$7 to the economy for every \$1 spent, and the expectation is that this new investment will have an equally positive return. We certainly need it.

For some veterans who are struggling in the current housing and economic crisis, it isn’t an education that’s their immediate challenge, it’s having a roof over their heads. While we don’t know the exact number of homeless veterans nationwide, the VA has estimated that there are at least 200,000. This is a disgraceful statistic; surely we can all agree that even one homeless veteran is too many.

To help address this problem, the Appropriations subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, which I chair, designated \$75 million this past year to provide 10,000 housing vouchers and support services to homeless veterans. In the 111<sup>th</sup>

Congress, we need to do more to ensure that no veteran who sacrificed abroad for our security is, quite literally, left out in the cold in his or her own country.

As we look to the many challenges of the new year, the new Congress, and the new Administration, we must remember to uphold our commitment to the uniformed men and women who have served America.

We still have a long way to go to fully meet the needs created by sending our loved ones off to war, and I pledge to do my part to deliver the support, care and assistance that America's veterans have earned.

Thank you."